

## **AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES**

### **February 5, 2009**

**Members Present:** Daniel Clapp, Joan Golowich, Joel Gordon, Rosemary Kofler, Kathy Koplow, Barbara Sutherland, David Yaukey

**Absent:** Doris Holden, Juana Trujillo

**Select Board Liaison:** Gerry Weiss

**Staff Present:** Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Giovanna Mix (Administrative Assistant for Programs), Priscilla Robbins (Senior Aide Program)

**Guests:** Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), Deb Jankowski (Town Counsel)

Shirley Packard, Ellie Vanetzian (Senior Health Advisory Group)

Sara Wolff, Jane Pemberton, Ann Lowell, Sylvia Cuomo (Stay Put Steering Committee)

Marge Babb

#### **Welcome:**

Dan Clapp, Vice Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:05 AM. He invited public comment. There was none.

#### **Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

The minutes of the December 4, 2008 meeting were approved and accepted.

#### **Friends of Amherst Senior Center Treasurer's Report:**

**Karen** reported in Doris' absence. A handout was provided. The Friends raised \$6,350 in FY08. So far in FY09 they have raised \$10,120. Since the last solicitation letter in November 2008 they collected \$5,285, indicating strong support for the Senior Center by members of the community. There is a balance of \$6,371.41 in the Checking Account and \$56,510.96 in the Investment Account. The report was approved and accepted.

### **CONTINUING BUSINESS**

#### **Friends Update:**

**Deb Jankowski** reviewed the steps taken to get 501c3 status. First, we organized as a non-profit organization. Now we must be recognized by the IRS as a tax-exempt organization. The application was sent and received in October 2008. It has been assigned to an examiner on January 21, 2009. The Friends is also eligible to be exempt from sales tax. Nancy said that would be helpful since the Travel Club is under the Friends and since we no longer have money in the budget for Center Activities. Deb will proceed and apply for sales tax exemption. In the meantime we continue to use our tax exemption under the Trust.

#### **Budget Update:**

**Larry Shaffer** said Governor Patrick informed the Town that our State aid would be reduced by \$970,000. The Town will have to make up that amount. So far that has been covered with unexpected revenues from other sources and FY09 problems seem to be resolved, or at least resolvable. Our biggest fear is FY10. The State announced it would cut our Town by \$2.8 million – 17% of its revenue. The Town is exploring options to deal with that cut, such as meals, lodging and telecommunications taxes. The Governor supports such measures. Advocates should contact Representatives and ask them to help expedite these measures.

The Town is working on the Federal Stimulus Package. In early January the Town submitted several capital projects that we presently have Town appropriations for. If the stimulus package is approved, federal money can be substituted for those projects, freeing up about \$1 million.

The Town has been aggressive with revenue enhancers such as raising money for sharing ambulance services (now up to about \$3 million from about \$1.4 million) and taking steps to down size our organization.

Larry remains dedicated to moving forward with the Senior Center fundamentally as it is. He will continue to work with Nancy to generate revenue other than tax dollars. Fundraising will have to be a higher

priority. There is little opportunity to reasonably shrink the Senior Center without damaging its programs and have it remain effective.

Larry invited questions.

**Dan** asked how much revenue would be raised from local options taxes.

Larry answered: about \$550,000 from meals tax; \$400,000 from lodging tax; \$250,000 from telecommunications tax. However, the Town also has problems with its own revenue stream. As interest rates go down so does return on the Town's cash reserves. Also, excise tax from automobiles is way down. Consequently the Town revenue loss will be about \$3-400,000 (in addition to the \$2.8 million reduction in State revenue). A lot of the income from the local option taxes will be used to make up the difference from Town revenue losses.

Larry added that the Town has a healthy Health Insurance Trust Fund with a surplus of about \$3.4 million. It could help bridge the gap. The Town is looking at a reorganization and regionalization of police and fire dispatch centers – that could save \$4-500,000. The Town reserves are back up to \$4 million – that could be used to bridge the gap.

An override would be very difficult to achieve in this financial environment.

**David** mentioned a recent gift from Amherst College. Larry is very grateful for their unrestricted gift of \$90,000 that will be applied to next year's budget.

**Joel** asked: if the meals tax were voted in, would the returns on the tax that are raised in Amherst go to Amherst?

Larry explained that it would probably be distributed similarly to other State aid in fairness to communities that have very few restaurants. The State 1% would be distributed, but the local option 1% would stay in Town.

Amherst has no authority to set its own tax. That is defined by the State.

**Shirley Packard** asked about plans for the South Amherst fire station. Larry said it would be a budget expense that the Town cannot afford. He suggested that the Town maintain 2 stations but relocate the station in the center of Town to a new headquarters somewhere on South Pleasant Street.

**Dan** asked if it would be wise to lobby legislators about increasing the 2½% limit on Prop 2 ½. Larry does not see that as a possibility. **Gerry Weiss** agreed.

## NEW BUSINESS

### **Stay Put:**

**Sara Wolf** introduced her colleagues on Stay Put – Ann Lowell, Jane Pemberton, Sylvia Cuomo and Joel Gordon. The group started 3 years ago with the concept of elders aging in place. Stay Put would like to work in affiliation with the Senior Center as a volunteer organization and make the services open to everyone. Originally it was planned as a membership organization and currently has a mailing list of 200 people. Stay Put hopes to attract more people to the Senior Center and underscore the needs of all seniors. They hope to get the approval of the Friends of the Senior Center and use the Friends as their fiscal sponsor, whereby donations to the Friends could be earmarked for Stay Put.

Over the year Stay Put has been meeting with Maura. They hope their volunteer staff will be able to collaborate with the Senior Center and assist Maura by providing seniors with lists of service providers and friendly visitors. They would like to use office space and a phone at the Senior Center. There would be several steps in getting started. First, the service providers need to be vetted. Next, they need to train the volunteers. The Stay Put steering group has written a letter to be sent to people on the mailing list of Stay Put explaining the intent thus stated. COA members have a copy of that letter.

**Nancy** stressed that Stay Put could be a tremendous help to Maura who presently spends a lot of time matching seniors with service providers. She sees "no downside" to collaborating with Stay Put.

**Dan** asked how the COA could help Stay Put. Sara would like to have more people involved in the steering group and attending their meetings. Dan likewise invited Stay Put to attend each COA meeting.

**Barbara introduced a motion: That the Senior Center becomes formally affiliated with the Stay Put organization to enhance services to seniors.** The motion was seconded. A long discussion followed.

**David** expressed hesitation, stating that the proposal seems vague. He would like to have time to look at the letter and suggested we put off our decision until the next COA meeting. He advocated caution in making a formal motion to legally affiliate with another organization. There may be unforeseen consequences. He likes the idea of "supporting" Stay Put but he is wary of the legalisms involved in a motion to affiliate.

**Joan** agrees. She would like to study this for one month before voting on an affiliation.

**Joel** expressed a slight reservation. This may be premature. Stay Put currently consists of just the steering group. It is not really an organization per se. The original interested members have not been informed of this proposal.

**Sara** suggested that it might be good for the COA to read the letter, formulate questions and take time to absorb this idea before voting on the motion.

**The motion was withdrawn.** COA members will study the proposal. A Stay Put representative will attend the March COA meeting to answer our questions.

### **Discussion of fees for clinicians providing services in the Bangs:**

**Nancy:** Since the Senior Center has no budget for SC Activities, Nancy has been brainstorming to find ways to cover our expenses. One idea: should clinicians that provide services to elders and collect a fee contribute something to the SC? They benefit by not having overhead costs, by not having to advertise, and two clinicians by having us make the appointments. There are 2 providers for foot care and one for massage. They do provide service at reduced rates. It is a great benefit to our seniors. Nancy inquired of other Senior Centers. One of our nurses quit her service to the Northampton SC when they instituted a fee. The S. Hadley SC collects a 10% fee.

Issues to be considered: 1) Should we charge a flat fee? 2) Should we charge a percentage based on the number of appointments? 3) How can we avoid having the money go into the general fund? 4) Can we put the money into Wellness Grants? 5) How do we prevent the provider from increasing the fee to the elder? 6) Should we just ask the providers for a periodic donation?

**Ellie Vanetzian** supports the fee even if it goes to the Town. The clinicians do get some tax benefits for the services they provide.

**Shirley Packard** suggested finding a professional podiatrist who could get Medicare reimbursement. Thus the patient would not have to pay a fee yet the SC could get some reimbursement because we would supply the office and make the appointments. Shirley is willing to look for a podiatrist to do foot care. Dan said he would be willing to provide ear irrigation for no fee.

The COA decided to table the issue.

### **SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE**

#### **Senior Health Advisory Group (SHAG):**

**Ellie** emphasized that the Senior Health Services is providing a wonderful service for the Town. It is funded by private donations and the outreach is funded by grants. There is no fee to see the nurse. Services of value come at a cost. Sharing the cost works out best (thus assessing a fee for clinicians seems fair).

**Shirley** said that SHAG would work on an evaluation form for the foot care and massage clinics.

#### **Ad Hoc Survey Committee:**

**Joel** reported that the professional group at the Center for Aging at UConn in Farmington, CT responded to the letter sent out. They could begin the survey in July 2009 and have the report ready by early 2010. Their bid for doing the survey is \$21,000. The people at UMass will not be able to give us a bid until the end of February. They see the survey as more of a community service. Nancy expects a lower bid from them. Either way, fundraising will have to occur.

#### **Highland Valley elder Services:**

**Joan** attended the January meeting. There were talks on the Brown Bag program and Healthy Living. There will be an Expo at the Log Cabin on March 2, 2009.

**Maura** spoke with John Lutz regarding the impact of budget cuts on HVES. They do not expect further cuts for 2010. However, because of the cuts already in place they have had to reduce services to home-care elders. When an elder no longer needs home care services they cannot automatically add another senior to the list. Instead, when referrals are made for home care services, those elders are being put on a waiting list and are prioritized. Those with the highest needs will get the service first. This will put more elders at risk. Maura also fears it may force more elders into nursing homes which are ultimately more expensive.

**Nancy** received word from the Department of Elder Affairs that the State has cut the higher amount we were expecting for the Formula Grant. Therefore, Nancy cannot increase Giovanna's hours.

**Friends Update:**

**Nancy** spoke on behalf of the Friends. Susan Whitbourne, Chair, is working with her students to put on a big fundraising event to benefit the Senior Center.

**STAFF REPORTS**

**Staffing Update:**

**Nancy** introduced **Priscilla Robbins**, known as Tasha. She is working as a Senior Aide funded by the Department of Elder Affairs. The Department gives job training to elders in need. Tasha works 20 hours per week. She is doing data entry and a variety of tasks. Tasha is a professional artist who lives in Hadley. **Evelyn Ross**, known as Evie, is the new HVES Assistant Lunch Site Director working with Ferne.

**Amherst College Emergency funds Update:**

**Maura** reported that 5 people have received help thus far. One woman got a loan for a mattress. There is still plenty of money in the fund.

**Nancy** announced that the Northampton Sheriff's Department received a donation of 1400 fleece blankets. The Senior Center is handing out the blankets to people in need.

The COA meeting adjourned at 10:47 AM.

**The next meeting of the COA will be held on March 5, 2009 at 9:00 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary

The approved minutes of the December 4, 2008 meeting were delivered to the Select Board office to be filed.